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# Robinson Jeffers Newsletter

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**NEWS AND NOTES**

The Annual Robinson Jeffers Festival is scheduled for the weekend of October 19th to 21st, events to be held at the La Playa Hotel in Carmel. Contact the Tor House Foundation, P.O. Box 1887, Carmel, CA 93921 (408) 624-1813.

Friday 5:00 to 7:00

Book signing reception for festival authors. Thunderbird Bookshop, The Barnyard, Carmel.

Saturday 10:00 to Noon

"The Letters of Robinson and Una Jeffers," Carpenter Hall, Sunset Cultural Center. Panelists: Robert Brophy, Robert Kafka, James Karman.

2:00 to 4:00

Seminar: "Jeffers as I knew him." Panelists: Mrs. Marcia Kuster Rider and others.

Annual Jeffers Banquet, La Playa Hotel, Carmel. 6:30 Social Hour-- 7:30 Dinner. Speaker: Paul Goldberger, Architecture Critic-- *New York Times*. Subject: "Coastal Zoning and Development: Architecture & Conservation in Jeffers Country."

Sunday 9:15

Annual Jeffers Poetry Walk. Beginning at Forest Theatre, ending with brown-bag picnic at Stewart's Beach at Noon. John Dotson, poet and educator, presiding.

**GARDEN PARTY.** This annual fund-raiser was held at Tor House on May 12. The color and magnificence of the current garden reflects Una's great joy in her flowers as revealed in letter after letter to her friends. A musical entertainment commemorated her joy in piano, organ, and human voice. Poetry readings by docents completed the evening.

Carol Booth Sharon has an article, "Sources of Power in Jeffers' Short Poems" (taken from her recent doctoral dissertation at U.C. Berkeley) in the *Tor House Newsletter*, Summer 1990. Subscription to the T H Newsletter, along with a membership that includes free tours and a discount at the docent's office, can be gotten through P.O. Box 1887. \$25.

*Quarry West* (Porter College, U.C. Santa Cruz 95064), Number 27, features a ten-essay Jeffers Symposium. Contributors are James Houston, Carolyn Kizer, Terry Beers, Patrick Murphy, Tim Hunt, Sharyn Blumenthal, Diane Wakoski, Alan Soldofsky, and William Everson. Single issue price \$7. See review in this issue.

*The Californians*, Volume 7, Number 6, has an extensive article by Kevin Starr: "The Literati: From Pasadena to Dijon and Back," which focuses on the life and career of Lawrence Powell, Ward Ritchie, M.F.K. and Alfred Fisher. In discussing the Powell's Dijon dissertation as published by Jake Zeitlin's Primavera Press in 1934, Starr reflects: "Powell confirmed Jeffers to be profoundly Californian in his choice of material, his life-style, his scientifically reinforced mysticism of transcendence through nature." The essay makes many connections between the writers and artists of Carmel and Los Angeles, with especially generous discussion of Jeffers.

*Modern American Poetry, 1865-1950* (Boston: Twayne, 1989) by Alan Shucard, Fred Moramarco, and William Sullivan, includes a chapter, "The Visionary Company," discussing Jeffers, Crane, and Cummings. It concludes: "Since Jeffers's death, a critical evaluation of his work has taken place. . . . Hostility toward him is fading, as evidenced by the interest in the Jeffers centennial celebration (1987) held at the Tor House and the anticipation of his *Collected Poems*."

Herbert Cerwin, journalist and cultural observer, has an article "Carmel as I Remember It," in the December 1989 issue of *Motorland*, illustrated by photos of the Jeffers family and Tor House.

A reminiscence, "To Visit Tor House," by Steve Nemirow, appeared in Number 6 of *KUKSU, Journal of Backcountry Writing*, 980 Alleghany Star Rt., Nevada City, CA 95959.

Bruce Aufhammer has a poem celebrating Jeffers in *Singing With Coyote: Selected Poems* (P.O. Box 520742, Longwood, FL 32752. \$7.55. Christopher-Burghardt Associates 1990).

Arthur Coffin's introduction to the *Heath Anthology of American Literature's* selection of Jeffers is an informative and accurate presentation of the poet's life and works. The Heath Anthology itself is a rich, varied, innovative, courageous departure in readings for college courses--bringing together a much wider variety of voices, ethnic, feminine, "unorthodox;" it goes far beyond the standardized gatherings of the last thirty years. The Jeffers poems as represented are: *Apology for Bad Dreams, Credo, Rock and Hawk, The Purse-Seine, Self-Criticism in February, The Bloody Sire, The Excesses of God, Cassandra, The Beauty of Things, Carmel Point, and Vulture.*

James L. Livingston has been assigned the article on Robinson Jeffers in Magill's *Critical Survey of American Literature*.

*Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Volume 54 (Gale Research) contains a lengthy reprint of criticism about Robinson Jeffers.

The annual bibliography of the journal *Western American Literature* lists twenty-two items on Robinson Jeffers in 1988.

A limited edition of Jeffers' poem, "Fire on the Hills," was printed by Quintessence Press, Amador City, CA, in November.

"Medea, A Dance Soliloquy" by Jane Brown, drawn from Robinson Jeffers' play, was presented in Oakland, CA, on December 2, 9, and 16.

The newly formed American Literature Association held a four day conference in San Diego, May 30 to June 2. A Friday panel chaired by Terry Beers of Santa Clara University, presented the following papers:

"The Thickening Empire: Jeffers' Struggle with History" by Timothy Hunt, Washington State University, Vancouver.

"Robinson Jeffers: Poet as Superman: A Dialogue with Czeslaw Milosz" by Alan Soldofsky, San Jose State University.

"The Sleeping Nymph in the Sacred Grove: Silence and Jeffers' Readers" by James Karman, California State University, Chico.

Respondent was Robert Brophy, California State University, Long Beach.

After the discussion of several years and much helpful input, especially by Robert Zaller, it was decided at the ALA Conference to inaugurate a Robinson Jeffers Association, with Terry Beers as Executive Director. The association aims to promote and support Jeffers studies, network scholars interested in Jeffers research, provide a forum for Jeffers scholarship at annual meetings of scholarly societies, meet annually, probably at the Carmel Jeffers Festival, and issue newsletter materials in conjunction with the RJN.

Robert Brophy has presented three Jeffers papers this winter-spring: "Whitman, Jeffers, and the Pacific Rim" to the California Studies Association conference, California State University, Sacramento, February 9; "The Drop-off Cliff of the World: Place in Robinson Jeffers" to the California American Studies Association, California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, May 4; and "Robinson Jeffers: The Book as Artifact" to "Los Compadres Con Libros" at the Sherman Library, Corona del Mar, CA, May 12.

Professor Tadeusz Slawek from the University of Silesia, Poland, was a recent guest visitor to Tor House. His *The Dark Glory, Robinson Jeffers and his Philosophy of Man, Earth & Things* (Katowice, Poland: Univ. of Silesia Press), written in English, will be released shortly.

**\*\*\*SEARCH FOR JEFFERS LETTERS\*\*\***

The editors of *The Collected Letters of Robinson Jeffers* (forthcoming from Stanford University Press) would appreciate hearing from anyone who possesses information about correspondence from Robinson or his wife, Una. Please write James Karman, Department of English, California State University, Chico, CA 95929-0830.

**TWO OBITUARIES**

James Hart, life-long aficionado and scholar of Jeffers poetry, died July 23rd at his home in Berkeley. His best known book, *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, appears on most scholars' desks. Born in San Francisco, he graduated from Stanford University, obtained an MA and doctorate from Harvard and returned west in 1936 to teach American Literature at U.C. Berkeley for more than 50 years. He became chairman of the English Department, was vice chancellor of the University between 1957 and 1960, and joined the world-famous Bancroft Library in 1961, becoming its director in 1967. He edited *My First Publication: Eleven California Authors Describe Their Earliest Appearances*, one chapter of which is Jeffers' discussion of *Flagons & Apples, Californians, and Tamar and Other Poems*. His American Literature courses almost always included a vigorous study and discussion of Jeffers. His latest dissertation-direction was for Carol Booth Sharon, mentioned earlier in these Notes.

George L. White, long-time President of the Tor House Foundation, genius behind and promoter of various Jeffers projects, died July 5<sup>th</sup> at the age of 81 in Carmel. Born August 28, 1908, in Westminster, Maryland, he became a writer, educator, and publisher. Before World War II he earned his doctorate in American and English Literature from the University of Pennsylvania. After heading the War Shipping Department during the early 1940s, he returned to civilian life to work for Films Inc. (Encyclopedia Britannica) and later became president of the Center for the Study of Instruction for Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in San Francisco. With his wife Frances he moved to Carmel in 1977 and was active in various civic organizations. In the 1970s he became founding member and, in the 80s, president of the Tor House Foundation, active in preserving the Jeffers Tor House/Hawk Tower compound, organizing an outstanding cadre of docents, and bringing stimulating speakers to the Annual Jeffers Poetry Festival each October.

In two scholarly endeavors he was especially helpful--in encouraging, assisting, and fund-raising for the Stanford edition of *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, edited by Tim Hunt and in early encouragement of another Stanford University Press project, *The Collected Letters of Robinson and Una Jeffers*, editors James Karman, Robert Kafka, and Robert Brophy.

George was a gentleman, soft but firmly-spoken, with a disarming touch of humor who proved himself totally dedicated and unusually competent, a visionary during the Foundation's most crucial years.

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**PUBLICATION ANNOUNCEMENT**

*Centennial Essays for Robinson Jeffers*, edited by Robert Zaller, University of Delaware Press (Associated University Presses):  
Expected publication date, 1991.

CONTENTS:

Editor's Introduction

Horace Gregory. "Poet Without Critics: A Note on  
Robinson Jeffers."

Robert Zaller. "Robinson Jeffers, American Poetry, and a  
Thousand Years."

Alex A. Vardamis. "The Critical Reception of Robinson  
Jeffers."

Robert Boyers. "A Sovereign Voice: The Poetry of Robinson  
Jeffers."

Tim Hunt. "Different Throats ... One Language: The Voice of  
Robinson Jeffers."

David Copland Morris. "Reading Robinson Jeffers: Formalism,  
Post-Structuralism and the Inhumanist Turn."

William Everson. "Prefaces to Jeffers."

Arthur Coffin. "Bricolage and Jeffers' Narratives of the  
Twenties."

R. W. Butterfield. "Loving to Death: A Consideration of  
The Loving Shepherdess."

Robert J. Brophy. "The Emasculation Syndrome among Jeffers'  
Protagonists."

Dell Hymes. "Jeffers and Native American Poetry."

Frederic I. Carpenter. "The Verbal Magnificence of  
Robinson Jeffers."

Edward A. Nickerson. "The Politics of Robinson Jeffers."

Czeslaw Milosz. "Robinson Jeffers."

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**REVIEWS**

*Songs and Heroes*. By Robinson Jeffers. Edited by Robert Brophy. (Los Angeles: Arundel Press, 1988. 29pp. \$185.00; 250 copies). Reviewed by Robert M. Kafka.

In the weeks following the publication of *Flagons and Apples* in 1912, young Robinson Jeffers purposefully began a new project. Having returned to Pasadena from Hermosa Beach, he wrote Una, "The MSs . . . I brought from the beach were the ones I need to compile *Songs and Heroes* -- your book." But soon, with marriage approaching, life "became more interesting than anybody's book," as he recalled years later, and the plans for *Songs and Heroes* were finally dropped. Nothing is known with certainty of its projected contents except that Catiline was to be represented among the heroes in a sonnet--"seems to me he'll make a good shocking kind o' one," Jeffers wrote Una at the time. Probably other classical figures were to be included; references to Alexander, Alcibiades, and Sulla, among others, appear in Jeffers' correspondence with Una at the time he was planning this collection. Though the two sonnets on Alexander and Alcibiades finally brought forward for publication in 1925 as "Two Garden Marbles" seem too polished--at least in their final form--to date from this period, they suggest what Jeffers may have had in mind for the "Heroes" section of his book. Both are descriptive sonnets based on material in Plutarch, whose *Lives* Jeffers had recently reread.

This slender volume of juvenilia issued under the title admittedly bears little resemblance to Jeffers' project. As a collection, it lacks coherence and a sense of order; these are poems, as Brophy points out, rescued from oblivion only by Una's intercession, and their context has been fragmented or lost. Included are twenty-two poems, all but one hitherto unpublished, that were acquired a few years ago by California State University at Long Beach. But if the title may not quite fit the poems--there are not many heroes here, shocking or otherwise--the contents justify its use, both because of the preponderance of ballads and lyrics, and because this collection comprises the largest surviving group of Jeffers' manuscripts that date from the period 1910-1913. Indeed, it is probable that many of these verses--though by no means all--would have been included had Jeffers carried through his plan.

*Songs and Heroes* documents some of the paths that Jeffers tried and rejected in his search for originality. Aside from a half dozen poems of the *Flagons and Apples* variety, pleasantly competent ballad stanzas on love and the lovelorn that Jeffers could turn out with evident ease, there are some surprises here. One untitled poem, for example, reveals Jeffers in a Decadent attitude. It begins, "Is it corruption of the mind that makes/Me love so hard hard gemlike eyes of snakes?" and ends:

Had I been Adam, shut in idle Eden,  
I would have fallen, tho' by Eve unbidden,  
Not for the magic apple, but because  
It had foam on it of the serpent's jaws.

Jeffers' familiarity with the Pre-Raphaelites may have suggested the mediaevalism of a ballad titled "Ellen's Song," as well as the lush opening lines of "A Silhouette" that bring to mind a D. G. Rossetti canvas:

Against the open window's bar she stands,  
Gazing far far o'er the vacant violent lands,  
Vast lands the purple mist of sunset veils.  
That ivy clinging to the window trails  
Its velvet leaves against her arm, to twine  
Slow verdant tendrils of the living vine  
In the divine soft twilight of her hair.

The poem is otherwise remarkable for its immoderate experimentation in consonance. Apart from the nine "v" sounds in the lines above, there are fourteen more in the remaining eleven lines of the poem, which ends enigmatically with the lady's eyes veiling "the inviolate mystery" of the old "immortal vision verified." Not surprisingly, the overuse of the device serves to obscure rather than to reveal the sense. Still, this is something new in Jeffers' development; extreme musical experimentation occurs neither in *Flagons and Apples* nor in the earlier college verse.

Other poems puzzle by the elusiveness of their allusion, yet provide interesting sidelight into Jeffers' interests and activities during a period in his life for which very little information is available. "The Titan" is a meditation on immutability, but the titanic voice is unidentified and the meaning of the turn in the final couplet is enigmatic. "First Chorus from Euphorion," thirty-eight lines of extended simile in

a single sentence, would appear to be a translation from a classical or Germanic source, judging from title, content, and manner--but no source has yet been identified. "Il Lamento--Mozkowski" is an elegy for a dead hero with curiously specific references--but the identity of the hero is unclear. The title, allowing for a simple orthographical error, might be taken from a piece for piano by Moritz Moszkowski, whose parlor music, though now out of fashion, was very much in vogue in the early years of this century. Interestingly, Moszkowski's works were sometimes included in the recitals of Leonora Montgomery, a product of the Los Angeles Music Conservancy. Leonora was one of Jeffers' romantic interests in 1-10; possibly she played the piece for him at her home in Hermosa Beach, the town in which Jeffers was rooming at the time.

Indeed, one intriguing aspect of this collection is biographical. Mention of cedars and firs--trees of the northwest coastal forest--identifies Lake Washington as the locale of "On the Lake." Jeffers wrote at least two other poems by the same name with Lake Washington as a subject. One he published in *Flagons and Apples*; the other (preserved in a transcription by Melba Bennett in the Gleeson Library at the University of San Francisco) he sent to Leonora Montgomery. Both clearly date from Jeffers' first residence in Seattle in 1910. The poem in this collection might have been written at the same time--though the fact that it is typed on the same kind of paper as "The Condemned," an ironical poem that possibly shows the influence on Jeffers of Willard Huntington Wright, may argue for the later residency when Jeffers canoed on Lake Washington with Una just before their wedding in 1913. "The Riding," with its references to faithlessness and forgetfulness, might refer to one of Jeffers' horseback rides along the beach at Santa Barbara with his cousin George Evans during the summer of 1912, when Una was away in Europe. And the sonnet "Two More Arts," which, like "La Tour D'Ebene," is a tentative attempt to define an aesthetic, is primarily interesting as a commemoration of the wrestling matches Jeffers engaged in at Hermosa with the Stookey brothers during the period 1908-1910. Other biographical inferences may be less obvious, but will not be hard to draw.

A decision was made not to overwhelm this little collection with editorial apparatus, and though some readers may wish for more than the single page each of introduction and notes provided, Brophy's comments are appropriately succinct and informative. There is, however, one substantive omission: the

typescript of "The Bacchantes" bears a cancelled dedication to Maud Allan, a dancer who at the time was compared to Isadora Duncan. On tour in the spring of 1910, Maud Allan performed in Los Angeles, where Jeffers no doubt saw her--accompanied, we may suppose, by either Leonora Montgomery or Una Kuster, each of whom nurtured keen interests in dance and music, arts that Jeffers was more or less indifferent to.

Of more presentational consequence than the editorial brevity are two obvious typographical errors in "Ellen's Song." In line 7, "have" should read "gave" and the first word in line 11 should be "At", not "A". It is regrettable that these errors should occur in the maiden appearance of this poem, and in a volume that is remarkable for its artful printing, extraordinary texture of paper, and tasteful binding.

The gradual restructuring of Jeffers' interior world, a process that eventually led to the discovery of his voice and the explosive poetry of the 1920s, did not begin until a few years after these poems were written. Here we find Jeffers still searching among his experiences for subject and theme, and attempting to fashion appropriate verse-forms. This collection, though randomly ordered and minimally annotated, uniquely documents that search--and therein lies its value.

. . . . .

*The Tribute of His Peers: Elegies for Robinson Jeffers.*  
Edited by Robert Zaller. (Carmel: Tor House Press, 1989, xxxiii,  
84 pp. \$6.00). Reviewed by Robert Brophy.

Robert Zaller, editor of this beautifully constructed little booklet, reiterates and demonstrates a thesis also used by Dana Gioia in his symposium essay mentioned below: It is not the critics but the poets who acknowledge and, out of their own personal need, give us insight into Robinson Jeffers. Here Zaller has gathered fifteen poets, most being securely successful ones if not all famous, who approach the phenomenon of the "stone mason of Tor House" out of a kind of necessary pilgrimage, revisit his country, and respond to the challenge he most evidently poses to each.

It seems a toss-up whether one should read the poems first or Zaller's introduction (xv-xxxiii)--perhaps the wisest way would be poems first and last with Zaller's perceptive, challenging, and non-condescending remarks in-between.

It may be a disservice to attempt to capture some of Zaller's essay in summary. The editor so works his poems in sequence that he can display a succession of interfacing, very personal poetic evocations. Everson he watches firmly balancing loss with nature's acceptance in his "The Poet is Dead." In Tim Reynolds' "The Stone-Mason" he finds a re-evocation of a coast by a poet who discovers Jeffers to be already part of the landscape. In Robert Hass's "The Return of Robinson Jeffers" he witnesses Jeffers being corrected for his refusal to identify with suffering humanity and make a place for it. In Czeslaw Milosz's "To Robinson Jeffers" he experiences a fellow poet's consternation confronting an alien vision that can neither be accepted nor dispelled. Alan Williamson's "For Robinson Jeffers" speaks to him of an isolate's integrity, beyond the glib put-downs of critics. In James Tate's "Failed Tribute to the Stonemason of Tor House" he senses an ironic self-deprecation in which modern words fail and the spectre Jeffers finds himself in suburbia. William Stafford in "After Reading Robinson Jeffers" suggests to the editor a sharing with Jeffers of a pain so deep it enforces isolation. In William Pitt Root's epistolary "Dear Jeffers" he notes the "suckertrap" community that would profit by Jeffers but understands none of him. In Tim Hunt's "Thoughts of Jeffers and Tor House" he feels the anguish of Jeffers' underlying horror of the soft and perishing stuff which was even his poetry, "an imagination of fire and slime." In John Brugaletta's "Jeffers' House" he hears Jeffers' own "passionate affirmation of meaning in the face of the void." He watches Adrienne Rich's "Yom Kippur 1984" wrestle with Jeffers' preference for solitude and rejection of multitude, as she asks what is solitude to the Jew in the pogrom, in the ever-pursuing Holocaust. In Diane Wakoski's "The Cap of Darkness" he sees Jeffers become implicit guide in Wakoski's search for self-definition and rejection of establishment poetics. In "Homage to Robinson Jeffers" he identifies with Peter Dale, seeing the world from Jeffers' bed-by-the-window, awed at religious truth evoked without dogma. Zaller ends comments (passing over his own fine "Poet, Be With Me") with a tribute taken from William Hotchkiss's "For Robinson Jeffers": "You were the master spirit... For ages will come to pay you reverence: you saw to the mystery/And still loved it, you fleshed the bones of the swan."

*Quarry West*, Number 27, "Robinson Jeffers: A Symposium."  
Edited by Alan Soldofsky. (Santa Cruz: Porter College,  
University of California. pp 71-135. Single issue price \$7.00).  
Issue reviewed by Robert Brophy.

*Quarry West*, edited by Ken Weisner, is issued twice a year from Porter College of the University of California, Santa Cruz. It publishes poetry, fiction, nonfiction, translationst short plays, graphics, and articles on poetics and aesthetic theory. Released in May 1990, Number 27 features a Robinson Jeffers symposium under the guest editorship of Alan Soldofsky. Contributors are fellow poets Carolyn Kizer, Dana Gioia, Diane Wakoski, Alan Soldofsky, and William Everson (who will be also recognized as one of Jeffers' key interpreters), along with Jim Houston, among other things a fiction writer of Santa Cruz; Terry Beers, the newly chosen Robinson Jeffers Association's executive director; Patrick Murphy, who has written three or four innovative Jeffers essays in recent journals and teaches at Indiana University of Pennsylvania; Tim Hunt, editor of *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* and newly at University of Washington, Vancouver; and Sharyn Blumenthal, professor at California State University, Long Beach's Department of Radio, Television, and Film and currently working on an hour-long Jeffers documentary for PBS, titled *Rock and Hawk*.

The variety of approaches to the appreciation and criticism of Jeffers, as represented here, is refreshing. Jim Houston's critique of one of Jeffers' more successful narratives, "Necessary Ecstasy: An Afterword to Cawdor," intimately relates Jeffers' Hippolytus-Phaedra plot with the majestic Big Sur coastal hills just north of Point Sur, that landscape being chief actor and protagonist, according to Jeffers' own words. Carolyn Kizer's "Robinson Jeffers" is largely autobiographical ("My parents nearly named me Tamar"); she recalls her mother reading Jeffers to her from her earliest childhood and the impact of Jeffersian imagery, cadence, and vision.

Dana Gioia's thesis in "The Coming Jeffers Revival" is that the groundswell reassessment and appreciation of the poet is coming not from academic critics, who are more interested in ideology than literature, but from poets, especially those working in non-autobiographical narrative forms and searching for models.

In his "Robinson Jeffers' Post Modern Poetry," Terry Beers notes the irony in the currently popular critical school of Deconstruction overlooking of Jeffers. Beers invites the reader into the lyric "The Place for No Story" using deconstructionist terms and strategies, finally concluding that his approach misses the point: to Jeffers, nothing human, including language "ever transcends the concrete manifestations and the elusive process of the cosmos."

Patrick Murphy's "Robinson Jeffers' Heroes: Divided and Resisting" develops the thesis that Jeffers presents, in characters from Tamar and California through Hoult Gore and the old man inhumanist, examples for the reader's resistance through interpellation to ideologies and he provides the occasion to investigate the "possibilities and limitations of resistance." He sees this character-coming-to-new-consciousness a paradigm for humanity and a necessary prerequisite for the survival and forward movement of the biosphere . . . concordant with planetary evolution."

Tim Hunt's "Once Upon a Manuscript" conjures up a Jeffers much more involved in his "Descent to the Dead" poems than the voice in the final text first might lead the reader to hear. The marginal hints, the stanzas cancelled or transmuted urge him to read the final text more deeply and he reflects on this for us.

In "Notes from a Filmmaker's Journal" Sharyn Blumenthal lets us share in her own introduction to Jeffers and reveals herself finding in it a strategy for bringing the reader into the poet and poetry. She sees herself and the reader torn between the aesthetic experience of the poem's power and the human drama of the lives of Robinson and Una.

Diane Wakoski ("Robinson Jeffers: American Socrates") analyzes Jeffers' intent and impact in light of I.F. Stone's recent study of the Greek philosopher, finding the poet constantly turning on paradoxes, pulled between the inhumanist and the tragedian in himself.

Alan Soldofsky's "Anti-Modernism and a Thousand Years" traces the maturing of Jeffers' inhumanism from a total denial of the reflexive and personal voice to an accommodation with that voice embracing suffering humanity within the beauty of the non-human world.

Finally Kevin Hearle's "An Interview with William Everson" takes the reader through a whole spectrum of Everson insights into Jeffers' cosmic vision and poetic intent, sexual fixations and growth, his invocation of archetype, violence, and astronomic imagination.

The symposium not only offers a variety of insights and investigations but is a model of brief exploratory essays which rivet the attention, make their point, and then conclude leaving the reader more breathless than burdened.

[Note: For the sake of clarity, the reviewer has revised paragraph 2 on page 15 for internet presentation. 3/27/2001]

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#### **JEFFERS COUNTRY FOR SALE**

The following are excerpts from two letters, slightly altered, to the Director of Planning & Building Inspection, Monterey County, at Salinas. The first was occasioned by a PUBLIC NOTICE posted at Kasler Point on the Big Sur Coast in March 1990. In barely readable jargonese, the NOTICE proclaimed a waiver of the need for public hearing regarding Transfer Development Credits at Kasler Point. The current coastal compromise with private property interests involves limiting development of buildings or other landscape changes to areas that cannot be seen from Highway One and roughly from Carmel Highlands to below Big Sur. Persons who own or buy property here can have development credits transferred to land (not otherwise available, evidently) which either cannot be seen from the highway or which lies between the Highlands and Carmel.

The first letter had the unexpected effect of blocking the executive order. The second letter, which followed much inquiry, negligible enlightenment, and a great deal of mystification, expresses the writer's frustration and finally a decision to withdraw the formal complaint for lack of resources and concern over mere obstructionism in a matter already decided.



The "we" reflects eighteen students of a Jeffers seminar who were touring "Jeffers Country" that weekend and who first discovered the NOTICE. The Pico Blanco reference takes notice of a very real possibility that the beautiful mountain (see Jeffers' lyric "Return") may still be reduced to a lime quarry through a combination of federal leasing and private landownership.

2 April 1990

Dear Mr. Slimmon:

I myself [Robert Brophy, seminar director] have lived in California all my life and treasured its beauty above any other place. I have raised my children here and given to them, I hope, an equal reverence for the landscape of this the Golden State, the "Continent's End," the closure to three thousand years' migrations.

For me the greatest beauty, dramatic and breathtaking, is the 21 miles between Carmel and Big Sur. I have loved it since the 1930s when my parents introduced me to its majesty. It is all of a piece; every turn of Highway One reveals a new vista, not of loveliness because that word suggests a lesser beauty, but of awesome, stunning grandeur.

The glory of that landscape is what Jeffers calls its "Inhumanism." It teaches us to uncenter ourselves from our parochial concerns, from our species' arrogance, its myopia, its megalomania. It teaches us that there is a presence bigger than ourselves, more numinous, more transcendent. It is, in itself, a wondrous revelation of God whom Rudolph Otto terms the "Mysterium Tremendum." It is "inhuman" inasmuch as it is witness to the greater world into which we fit as one species among many, one fragment of an Overwhelming Reality. It imbues us with humility.

We as Californians presumably can do little about the relatively few human structures which already dot this incredible coast. Some have historic value; others are necessary evils since the litigation for removing them would be prohibitive. To an extent they serve a purpose--that of emphasizing our human insignificance and precariousness against the vital, violent, and overwhelming force of the coast. But fewer is better.

Although the syntax of your PUBLIC NOTICE refers the words to the California Coastal Conservancy's amendment, the phrase "of a minor and trivial nature" seems, in its mean spirit, to refer to the coast itself at Kasler Point. The impact of your decision transfers the value-judgment to the landscape. The language of the NOTICE is so typically vague and legalese that one is left to guess what is afoot. It takes little imagination to infer, however, that more buildings are going up and do not want to be subject to full public review as required by the permit. I am truly appalled and outraged by this and hereby enter my vehement protest and challenge.

Once an easement is given and any building permitted, the blight of such structure, whatever it be, reaches into perpetuity. It steals from our children's children; it diminishes the future. Private property rights have amounted to idolatry in the Western World. The Indians knew better than we. They built temporary dwellings and burned them periodically and moved on. They could not understand fences and surveyor stakes.

We have, as a race, demolished much of God's gift by the property-right mentality; we clear-cut forests that have stood a thousand years; we dam a gorgeous Hetch Hetchy Valley to make a water storage tank for a burgeoning San Francisco population.

But, on a hopeful note, we as a race have begun to awaken to the responsibility we have to place, to environment--not just selfishly (for we need revise our priorities if only to survive) but unselfishly. Other species have rights; even the landscape has its inviolable holiness. We once thought of ourselves as masters and stewards, though we were mostly spoilers; now more and more we are moved to accept a place on earth as co-inhabitants. We try to fit in rather than wrest to our will.

What your ruling does is give disproportional and unjustified privilege to one individual (or several). At the same time the ruling would take away forever (for who will give up such property usage once granted) from millions who, whether they know it or not, are nourished and taught by this God-gift of beauty, this lesson in transcendence and humility.

We sense behind the NOTICE and its claim of jurisdiction a legal and mathematical mind-set which is difficult to speak to. It deals in parcels and lots, in surveyor's measurements. The same mind is said to have considered the number of gallons which a damming of the Colorado River would provide by filling the Grand Canyon.

Our anger urges us to forbid you in God's name to steal from us, to commit this sacrilege, to deform and desecrate, to reduce a common heritage to private privilege. We choose, rather, to appeal to your sense of the greater good for us all.

If we have grossly overread your NOTICE, we would gladly be corrected. We feel conscience-bound to insist on a full legal process that might prevent further contamination of this treasure and magnificence. We might here begin to draw back from the headlong development syndrome, hidden under various guises, which continues to be our curse upon the good Earth.

20 April 1990

We have been informed now that the tortured language of the PUBLIC NOTICE which we found on Kasler Point does not mean construction will be cutting off or degrading the view, but will be doing the same elsewhere further north. It is ironic that the great Carmel photographer and author of "Jeffers Country," Horace Lyon, took his final photos of Jeffers, late in the poet's life, standing against the pristine hillside of the Victorine Ranch, which is now so conveniently being subdivided for the lucky few.

No doubt we are purists. We want NO development on the coast. Our instinct is to oppose every effort at compromise. It seems to us that what we have here is a Game which has these rules: 1) buy here on the "viewshed," 2) we will forbid you to build, 3) to honor your private property rights, we will give you credits to build on a scenic second site (which is not available to others).

We really object to it ALL and that is probably our irremediable problem. We are not into compromising. We don't agree that the beautiful land should be protected only from those developments which would be seen from the Coast Highway. This is not our definition of preservation; the coast should be treated as wilderness area--the kind which psychologists say we need for our psychic survival. The TDC compromise implies the coming of any number of buildings--below the shoulder line of the road or in this or that gulch or up that canyon. It means flora and fauna impact, increased traffic, off-road vehicles, RV parking, turnoffs, and access roads.

Our arguments still stand. Private Property Rights are the God. Those with Money, Power and Lawyers win out. Natural Resources of Mystic Beauty and Soul-Expanding Grandeur, the heritage we would leave our children--are low on the Governor's and the State's priorities. We can put hundreds of billions into B-2 Bombers for sabre-rattling. We can dole out to agribusiness, millions in welfare payments, but we can't take care of the Commonweal. That seems to be a given.

We do not like the laws. For instance, the PUBLIC NOTICE did not have to be made public, but was posted, as we understand it, at only three places almost inaccessible on Kasler Point itself. We cannot personally accept the hierarchy of values we live by. Bruce Woolpert can still threaten to reduce Pico Blanco to a lime quarry. Our President may approve offshore drilling and endanger all marine species. In "November Surf" Jeffers thought we as a race were bringing eco-disaster on ourselves which would return us to a cave civilization. People used to laugh at his supposed misanthropy, but some of us laugh less as we see the world turn.

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**ON HELEN VENDLER: A RESPONSE TO TIM HUNT**  
[RJN 77:13-22, 22-25]

By Robert Zaller

Dear Tim: One must give the Devil her due, surely; but why so much more? Vendler's venomous review of *Rock and Hawk* takes its place beside Winters, Blackmur, and the rest of the academic mites who periodically try (and eternally fail) to bury Jeffers. Must we dignify this old and tattered party line with the name of the argument? Vendler's shortcomings as a critic have been noted by others, but this review isn't criticism: it's hatchet work. There have been good critics who have put forward forceful arguments against Jeffers; I think of Delmore Schwartz and Clement Greenberg. One can respect them in disagreeing. Vendler has no argument. She simply states, with a couple of quotations for effect, that Jeffers' development was arrested at the age of thirty-five by moral cowardice ("timidity" is her euphemism) and that what he wrote was in any case a species of prose--bad prose, imitation Cicero. We have heard this before, except for the charge of cowardice that places Vendler in a Rogue's Gallery all her own.

I've searched in vain for the connection you espy between Vendler and the introduction to *Rock and Hawk* by Robert Hass. Hass' essay is a thoughtful meditation on a poet he has lived with for a long time, sympathetic even where critical. Vendler raids it for negative adjectives, wrenched out of context to fill up her own empty case. It is nothing new to see Jeffers' work as reflecting "a continuing intellectual and emotional drama;" the same could be said of most other poets of value. What Vendler does is to deny that drama any conscious articulation in Jeffers, thus relegating him to the sub-artistic. I see no ground here for engagement between Hass' nuanced view of Jeffers' development and Vendler's denial that there was any development in the last forty years of his career. As for the preposterous canard that accompanies it, how need one demonstrate that the creator of Tamar Cauldwell, Arthur Barclay, the Jesus of "Dear Judas," or the Hanged God of "At the Birth of an Age" had courage sufficient to the needs of his art?

Vendler's bizarre readings of individual poems are on a par with her general observations. How anyone could find the third stanza of "The Bloody Sire" an "instinctive conjunction of beauty, sex, religion, and murder," or the irony of "Cassandra" an attempt by Jeffers to exalt himself "above both gods and men" is a mystery, but one I fear not worth pondering. And how account for the grotesque misreading of "On an Anthology of Chinese Poems" as an involuntary confession of Jeffers' own failed aesthetic?

There is a familiar strategy at work here, to dismiss Jeffers as "a notable minor poet" who managed to give an "adequate" description of some California "scenery." The banality of the language perfectly mirrors the superficiality of thought. If Jeffers had been "braver," Vendler suggests, we might read him as we read Milosz--a backhanded way, one presumes, of correcting Milosz himself for having acknowledged Jeffers' stature. You observe that "Vendler won't be easily convinced" to change her mind about Jeffers. May I suggest that this is a project whose priority seems as low as its feasibility? By all means, let us welcome and engage responsible criticism of Jeffers. By the same token, let us not validate *ad hominen* attacks dressed up as such.

The choice of position you offer between Hass and Vendler is indeed "different than the one many of us have held," but why must we make it? Hass clearly sees the best of Jeffers in the lyric poems; Vendler denies that they are lyrics or poems. I don't see how either viewpoint leads us toward the "adequate defense for the narratives" you've called for. I wonder, too, what such a defense need consist of. Like any poet, Jeffers has his greater and his lesser achievement; if I defend *Cawdor*, must I defend *Mara* equally too? Must we prove that the narratives are poetry, and by whose standard and to what purpose must we prove it? It seems to me that the ultimate value in any body of work is the scope and coherence of the vision it projects. I continue to find Jeffers' vision a challenging one, and to search for new ways of expressing my sense of it. By all means, let us show how his line responds to the pressure of that vision, how stress and image shape and are shaped by it. But let us remember too, that the best criticism can only testify, never demonstrate. In the last analysis, I can no more "refute" Vendler than she can persuade me. It is, as Jeffers himself suggests in the poem Vendler so wretchedly misreads, "a moral difference perhaps," for what is the aesthetic sense but the moral court of last resort?

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M. J. MURPHY. COURTESY OF MRS. ROSALEE MURPHY GLADNEY

**M.J. MURPHY MASTERBUILDER AND TOR HOUSE**

By Robert Brophy

M.J. Murphy was an early building contractor in Carmel. From his first house built in 1902 on Mission Street at age 17, he constructed more than 300 homes of "charm and character" as well as Harrison Memorial Library, parts of the Pine Inn, the La Playa Hotel, and other noteworthy structures.

In April of 1990, the City Council of Carmel-by-the-Sea designated the Mission Street house, the forerunner of the "Carmel Cottage," as its first historic building, agreeing to allow the house to be relocated at one of the lots at Lincoln and Sixth Avenue, where as a symbol of Carmel's historic beginnings it can be saved from demolition and turned into a meeting house "where friends can gather for a game of chess, a light snack, good conversation, taped music and an opportunity to view Carmel memorabilia."

M.J. was the builder of Tor House. Una thus describes the event: "In 1919 we built Tor House on a knoll where stones jutting out of the treeless moor reminded us of tors on Dartmoor. Our favorite walk had been along the grass grown track that wound around the Point. At that time there were no houses, except for Reamer's and the Driftwood Cottage, beyond Philip Wilson's at 14th and San Antonio; instead acres of poppies and many colored wild flowers spread out like a millefleurs tapestry, and golden-breasted meadow larks sang enchantingly from every lupin bush."<sup>2</sup>

Melba Bennett gives particulars of the building plans: "The Jefferses had decided to use granite rather than the perishable chalkstone, and engaged a contractor named Murphy, and the stone mason Pierson of Monterey. Heavy granite boulders were lifted from the beach to the construction site. . . . "<sup>3</sup>

Una then takes up the narrative, detailing her husband's part in the project: "The anxiety of these years (and the children) seemed to bring to maturity a mind which hadn't made itself really face things until then. It was then, too, he did his first manual labor. We had bought the land on the cliff here outside the village in spring 1919 and had let the contract for a small stone house (finished early August 1919). It was far outside the village and was going so slowly we decided to try to



get the contractor to hire R.J. so that he could keep an eye on the men. R.J. hadn't any skill of any kind so he did the hardest and plainest job (at \$4.00 a day, I think), mixed mortar and carried the hod to the master mason. It was thus he learned to handle stone, and the craft of mason which led to years of building (garage, tower, walls, etc.)."

Donnan Jeffers fills out the picture: "As soon after the Great War as building was possible, Una and Robinson bought sixteen of the little lots, including those that contained their beloved tor, and had soon engaged M.J. Murphy, a pioneer building contractor of Carmel, to erect a small house for them. Una had very special ideas as to what the house should be. It must be small and built of stone and in appearance it must resemble a Tudor barn that she had admired on a trip to England seven years before. Perhaps she had a photograph of the barn or perhaps, from her description, Robin drew a rough sketch for Murphy."<sup>4</sup>

Donnan continues: "Soon foundations were being excavated, by horse-drawn scraper and pick and shovel, and the first stones put in place. Murphy constructed a wooden railway from the shore to the top of the cliff and on this little car, pulled by horses, drew the stones up from the beach."

Of the contractor, Donnan recounts: "Murphy was a burly Irishman of great strength and endurance, and he worked right along with his men. Robin, in later years, often spoke of once watching him on the beach holding a crowbar while one of his workmen wielded a sledge hammer to dislodge a boulder. The workman missed his aim and brought the hammer down on Murphy's arm with such force that it would have broken that of a lesser man. Murphy's only reaction was to exclaim: 'Ouch! Be more careful, damn it!' and he went on holding the crowbar."

This spring (1990), Rosalee Murphy Gladney, one of Murphy's twin daughters, sent to Jeffers' son Garth the original billing estimate, in Murphy's handwriting, for Tor House.<sup>5</sup> To a contemporary eye, used to the overwhelming complexities of building materials, labor-skill division, and myriad and mind-staggering costs, it is starkly simple, austere, and beyond any imaginable calculation of equivalent dollar values:

May 17, 1919

Jeffers

Lumber	570.00
Fireplaces	110.00
Plumbing	275.00
Windows	95.00
Floors	30.00
Wiring	20.00
Cesspool	35.00
Hardware	35.00
Stairs	75.00
Cases	35.00

(Window casings]

Labor	250.00
Stone work	<u>550.00</u>

2080.00

3/2250

750

Profit & Ins.	<u>150.00</u>
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2230.00

3

50

(These figures are unexplained; perhaps a calculation of installments.)

The Murphy-connection endured through the years. The twin baby carriage that appears in early Jeffers family photos was lent from the Murphy twins. In response to a query about the \$20 for wiring, Garth Jeffers has recently replied: "Item No. 6 on the estimate is a bit puzzling since there was no wiring in Tor House until after the war. Rosalee can't explain it either. At least Donnan and I got the \$20 back several times over. After Mike retired around 1940, we used to meet him frequently in bars where he liked to meet his friends. Our money was no good when he was around."<sup>6</sup>

NOTES

1. Fund-raising letter, 8 May 1990, circulated by the First Murphy Steering Committee, P.O. Box 3959, Carmel, CA 93921.
2. Carmel Pine Cone, 10 January 1941, quoted in Melba Bennett's *The Stone Mason of Tor House* (Los Angeles: Ward Ritchie, 1966), pages 87-88.

3. Ibid.
4. *Robinson Jeffers Newsletter*, 53 (June 1979), page 9, reprinted in *The Robinson Jeffers Newsletter, A Jubilee Gathering, 1962-1988* (Los Angeles: Occidental College, 1988), pages 112-113. The same issue of the RJN contains a "plot plan" for Tor House, a to-scale property map showing location and dimensions of the buildings, gardens, lawns, garages, and tower (page 25), and an assessor's map detailing the lot division for the property bounded by ocean View Avenue, Stewart Way, and Scenic Road (page 26).
5. The RJN is grateful to Mrs. Rosalee Murphy Gladney and, in turn, to Garth Jeffers for making this document available.
6. Letter dated 26 April 1990, RJN archives.

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INHABITATION IN THE POETRY OF  
ROBINSON JEFFERS, GARY SNYDER AND LEW WELCH

By Eric Paul Shaffer

In his celebrated essay, "Walking," Henry David Thoreau calls for an "American mythology." Realizing that inhabiting the land would be much more difficult than occupying the New World, Thoreau asks, "Where is the literature which gives expression to Nature?" (*Portable* 616-17). Thoreau's early call for inhabitation went unheard or was not understood; however, he continued to write of the significance of giving expression to nature. What Thoreau was noting was a lack of native knowledge and intelligence about the land where he and the rest of that generation of first Americans were born and lived. All of their myths were foreign to the soil of which they were made. Thoreau was missing what he realized were the stories, poems, and songs native to the nature of a particular place, and these are what I call "the mythology of ecology." The particular and useful knowledge of the animals, plants, seasons, and geography of a place is what humans pass along the years to each other in the myths that they tell and re-tell. The lack of this knowledge is what makes the foreigner truly foreign, for he brings his knowledge of his former place and superimposes it on the new place. Thoreau did not want to establish myths from other lands in the new world; he wanted to discover the autochthonous myths of America. In "Ktaadn," Thoreau shouts,

Talk of mysteries! Think of our lives in nature--  
daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it--  
rocks, trees, wind on our cheek! the solid earth! the  
actual world! the common sense! Contact! Contact!  
Contact! Who are we? Where are we? (135)

"The common sense" emphasizes the tangible and present rather than the distant in time and space, and Thoreau's *Walden* is partly an experiment in inhabitation. Thoreau discovers that his wanderings through the countryside become his wonderings as well; the result is that his intellectual speculations are grounded as firmly in where he is as the trees that shade his little shack. He finds that where he is determines to a great extent who he is. Gary Snyder, the actualizer of Thoreau's theorizing, makes the same equation of person and place when he states in his essay, "Re-Inhabitation," that "knowing who and where are intimately linked" (*Ways* 64). Snyder's extension and realization of

Thoreau's ideas makes the fusion of the many kinds of knowledge of place, the mythology of ecology, an inseparable part of the inter-dependent co-creation" of people and place (Snyder, *Hold* 132). For if Thoreau stresses that a true American mythology must arise from speaking for nature, and from preferring wildness to tameness, then Snyder stresses the notion that nature means here, right where you are, the people, wildlife, and landscape around you now. Direct study of ecology, the complex of natural inter-relationships of the environment, is the beginning of a mythology for the place inhabited. As Snyder points out in "The Incredible Survival of Coyote," "[t]here are specific things to be learned from each bird, plant, and animal--a natural system is a total education--and this learning is moral as well as being useful for survival" (*Ways* 87). Learning the ways of the place you live occurs on the physical, mental, and spiritual levels simultaneously and requires the integration of these different sorts of knowledge; this is inhabitation.

As Thoreau does, Gary Snyder notes the "very close correspondences between the external and the internal landscape" (Snyder, *Work* 5). Snyder's unique contribution is to realize and act on the notion that one cannot fully know the internal landscape without the external one. In "Re-Inhabitation," Snyder delineates the implications of this correspondence:

How does knowledge of place help us know the Self? The answer, simply put, is that we are all composite beings, not only physically but intellectually, whose sole individual identifying feature is a particular form or structure changing constantly in time. There is no "self" to be found in that, and yet oddly enough, there is. Part of you is out there waiting to come into you, and another part is behind you, and the "just this" of the ever-present moment holds all the transitory selves in its mirror. . . . [There is] no self-realization without the Whole Self, and the whole self is the whole thing. (*Ways* 63-64)

Snyder's denial of a separation between individual and environment is the crucial aspect in defining inhabitation. To inhabit a place means to know who and where you are and what you are doing there in the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. An inhabitant knows who she is because she knows where she is, and she knows and expresses all the human and natural significance of the place. Inhabitation is what you do with your body and your mind in the place where you live. The

poet must express the significance of the present, the person, and the place, and the co-incidence of their being; the result is inhabitation. Synthesizing the ideas of Thoreau and Snyder, then, we may say that the poet who speaks for nature, who creates the mythology of ecology in America, as Thoreau directs, is the poet who speaks of place, as Snyder demonstrates. He is the poet who regards, even reads, the landscape and speaks or sings what he sees. The "song" arising from a particular place of inhabitation contains natural and cultural information derived from accurate observation of place. The "song of Gaia at that spot" expresses the communion of wildlife, human life, and land in a manner which shows the inseparability of inhabitant and place. (Snyder, *Ways* 65).

*Turtle Island* (1974) is practically a handbook for inhabitation, and the "Introductory Note" announces this intention plainly:

The poems speak of place, and the energy-pathways that sustain life. Each living being is a swirl in the flow, a formal turbulence, a "song." The land, the plant itself, is also a living being--at another pace. . . . Hark again to those roots, to see our ancient solidarity, and then to the work of being together on Turtle Island. (ix)

One of Snyder's plainest statements about the relationship of people, place and planet, our "inter-dependent co-creation," appears in "By Frazier Creek Falls:"

This living flowing land  
is all there is, forever

We are it  
it sings through us--

We could live on this Earth  
without clothes or tools! (41)

In "Ethnobotany," Snyder relates the course of a mushroom hunt and shows its relation to inhabitation:

Two yellow, edulus  
"edible and choice,"  
only I got just so slightly sick--

Taste all, and hand the knowledge down. (51)

"What Happened Here Before" demonstrates another important aspect of inhabitation: knowing the natural history, human and geological, one lives for as far back as one can. Snyder's poem moves from 300,000,000 years ago to the present, and this survey of time in place is the answer to the question that his "sons ask, who are we?" (80). Snyder chronicles the events and then concludes with the present and its divergent approaches to place:

military jets head northeast, roaring every dawn.  
my sons ask, who are they?

WE SHALL SEE  
WHO KNOWS  
HOW TO BE

Bluejay screeches from a pine. (80-81)

The jay is most likely the Stellar's Jay, known for calls in a series of three and common in the conifers of elevations like that of Kitkitdizze, Snyder's home on the San Juan ridge in the Sierra foothills. The accuracy of the poet is remarkable enough to allow those who know the area but were not present a good chance to recognize the actual bird. This not only provides a good example of the knowledge of the inhabitant in action, but also the challenge of the bluejay makes the contrast clear between an inhabitory people and occupying forces. "WHO KNOWS/HOW TO BE" will endure as the land endures. Unlike the occupying forces, the children of the inhabitants will live on the land long after the-present inhabitants are gone; they are the ones to whom we hand the knowledge down, so it is appropriate that the penultimate poem of *Turtle Island* is "For The Children:"

The rising hills, the slopes,  
of statistics lie before us.

the steep climb  
of everything, going up,  
up, as we all  
go down.

In the next century  
or the one beyond that,  
they say,  
are valleys, pastures,  
we can meet there in peace  
if we make it.

To climb these coming crests  
one word to you, to  
you and your children:

stay together  
learn the flowers  
go light (86)

A poem for the future inhabitants of the place underscores the virtues and longevity that inhabitation provides and reminds us that one of the primary purposes of living as an inhabitant is to ensure the continuance of culture.

As another poet with a concern for the future of humanity and the planet, Robinson Jeffers was of great importance to Gary Snyder and Lew Welch. Still, Jeffers is perhaps the most problematic of these writers since it is through the work of Snyder and Welch that Jeffers' perspective can be seen as generating an awareness that would lead to the development of re-inhabitory strategies. Jeffers passes along accurate information and observations, and he is one of the first American poets to show concern for the planet on a global and geologic time scale while examining humanity from the same perspective. This involved re-evaluating some of our cherished national myths and actually looking at the state of progress, technological development, that the United States had achieved. Jeffers examined things as they actually were and found the anthropocentric metaphors of Western civilization unsatisfactory and misleading. One of his first evaluations of human civilization relies on the demographics and population growth information accessible to nearly everyone, yet noted by none. In "The Purse-Seine," Jeffers compares the drawing-in of a sardine net, the water luminous at night with the thrashing of trapped fish, with the glowing appearance that the gathering of city lights make from a distant height. His ruminations on the correspondence are startling eco-centric:



We have gathered vast populations  
incapable of free survival, insulated  
From the strong earth, each person in himself helpless,  
on all dependent. The circle is closed, and the net  
Is being hauled in. (*Selected Poems* 62)

This is an argument against living in an exclusively anthropocentric and human-created world, and, in its own way, is a call for re-inhabitation. Clearly, Jeffers was generating an awareness that would lead to a recognition of the problem and a search for solutions.

Jeffers was severe with the tiny prides of humanity, and, finding the human perspective insufficient, Jeffers developed his philosophy of "inhumanism," meaning an ecological perspective on humanity and the planet: the vision is central to his poetry and vital to his connection with re-inhabitation. The ecological perspective may also have kept Jeffers grudgingly honest about the actual place of humanity on the planet. Jeffers has endless attention for the world around him, but he seldom fails to recognize his own humanity and often brings back advice or warnings from the natural world to his fellow humans. In "Carmel Point," Jeffers elaborates "the extraordinary patience of things" and then turns to humanity:

As for us:  
We must uncenter our minds from ourselves;  
We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident  
As the rock and ocean that we were made from.  
(*Selected Poems* 102)

Jeffers even provides a plan for growing beyond the present state of humanity as he sees it. In a fundamental sense, his poem, "Signpost" marks a fork in the road of human development as Jeffers offers a plan that would lead to re-inhabitation:

Civilized, crying how to be human again: this will tell you  
how.  
Turn outward, love things not men, turn right away from  
humanity,  
Let that doll lie. Consider if you like how the lilies grow,  
Lean on the silent rock until you feel its divinity  
Make your veins cold, look out at the silent stars, let your  
eyes  
Climb the great ladder out of the pit of yourself and man.

Things are so beautiful, your love will follow your eyes;  
Things are the God, you will love God, and not in vain,  
For what we love, we grow to it, we share its nature. At

length

You will look back along the stars' rays and see that even  
The poor doll humanity has a place under heaven.

Its qualities repair their mosaic around you, the chips of  
strength

And sickness; but now you are free, even to become human,  
But born of the rock and air, not of a woman.

(*Selected Poetry* 574)

Jeffers attempts to effect his ideas in his close observation and careful relation of the actual: "Permanent things are what is needful in a poem, things temporally/of great dimension, things continually renewed or always present" (*Selected Poetry* 78). Since "things continually renewed or always present" are "permanent," he often reads the present in the eternal, and the eternal in the present. In "Boats in a Fog," Jeffers watches six fishing boats move slowly through a fog in Monterey harbor and says of the scene,

A flight of pelicans

Is nothing lovelier to look at;

The flight of the planets is nothing nobler; all the arts  
lose virtue

Against the essential reality of creatures going about their  
business among the equally

Earnest elements of nature. (*Selected Poems* 37)

Jeffers also provides demonstrations of his advice in "De Rerum Virtute" to "look--and without imagination, desire, nor dream--directly/At the mountains and sea," (*Selected Poems* 105); for one of the primary responsibilities of re-inhabitation is to observe-to live and learn and pass the knowledge on. In "Vulture," a poem that was part of Lew Welch's inspiration for his own "Song of the Turkey Buzzard," Jeffers recounts the day a turkey vulture mistook him for dead. Turkey vultures are common on the coast of California, and contrary to the common symbolic anthropocentric associations with death, destruction, doom, disease, and decay, Jeffers describes the beauty of the actual bird and discovers a joy in the continuance the ecological cycles enact:

But how beautiful he looked, gliding down  
On those great sails; how beautiful he looked, veering away  
in the sea-light over the precipice. I tell you solemnly  
That I was sorry to have disappointed him. To be eaten by  
that beak and become part of him, to share those wings and  
those eyes--  
What a sublime end of one's body, what an enskyment; what a  
life after death. (*Selected Poems* 107)

If Jeffers chose a totem, he relates his choice in "Rock and Hawk." Speaking of two common and actual presences in the land he lived on, Jeffers relates the emblem of his understanding of his own presence in the world:

This gray rock, standing tall  
On the headland, where the seawind  
Lets no tree grow,

Earthquake-proved, and signed  
By ages of storms: on its peak  
A falcon has perched.

I think, here is your emblem  
To hang in the future sky;  
Not the cross, not the hive,

But this; bright power, dark peace; fierce  
Consciousness joined with final  
Disinterestedness;

Life with calm death; the falcon's  
Realist eyes and act  
Married to the massive

Mysticism of stone,  
Which failure cannot cast down  
Nor success make proud.  
(*Selected Poems* 56)

Since a totem is found in the environment one inhabits, the mystical correspondence between a human and a chosen totem must of necessity awaken one to the land one lives on. As an animal that shares your place, your totem may teach you much about your place you would not otherwise know.

To many, Jeffers appears to be an unpleasant man with nasty things to say about humanity, but his seemingly negative statements are the result of his "[f]ierce consciousness joined with final/Disinterestedness" in examining the presence and place of people on the planet. He insists on the earnest and "inhuman," meaning not human-centered, nature of the planet and the importance of ecological cycles being regarded as basic, primary, and equal to those of humans. In "The Beauty of Things," Jeffers allows a view of the complete vision of the poet in his place: "to feel/Greatly, and understand greatly, and express greatly, the natural/Beauty, is the sole business of poetry" (*Selected Poems* 94).

Lew Welch, a close reader of Henry David Thoreau and Robinson Jeffers, and a close friend of Gary Snyder from 1950 until Welch's disappearance in 1971, knew and acted on the call for inhabitation in America. In the early sixties, Lew Welch wrote much of what was to become the *Hermit Poems* (1965), in which he formulated and presented many of the insights that lead to inhabitation. Welch's approach was simple and straightforward; he instructed:

Step out onto the Planet.  
Draw a circle a hundred feet round.

Inside the circle are  
300 things nobody understands, and, maybe  
nobody's ever seen.

How many can you find?  
(*Bone* 73)

The instructions are simple because Welch assumes no separation between person and place. To teach inhabitation, Welch demonstrates how inseparable from the environment we are and demonstrates the exact manner of his empirical approach to phenomena, which he states explicitly in the poem entitled "Philosophy:" "Never ask Why What,/Always ask What's What./Observe, connect, and do" (115). This last line is even a practical formula for inhabitation; "Observe, connect, and do" describes a process by which one becomes what one studies: the collection of observations and the subsequent discovery of connections which cause or direct your actions describes simultaneously the process of inhabitation and the development of the mythology of ecology.

For Welch, the most important part of inhabitation was breaking down distinctions--between person and person, person and place, and person and immediate presence in time and space. For him, his book *The Song Mt. Tamalpais Sings* was the "Start of a new American religion." The book, he said, is "Tamalpais singing it to me. We are what our land and air is, etc." (*Letters* 2:157). In another poem, "Theology," Welch wrote, "Religion is Revelation:/all the Wonder of all the Planets striking/all your only Mind./Guard the Mysteries!/Constantly reveal them!" (114). This spirit informs *The Song Mt. Tamalpais Sings*, and the poems grow directly from the place he stands; Welch wrote, "My teacher is this gentle mountain I live on" (*Letters* 2:168).

Welch also includes three "riddles" for his "new American religion;" of them, he wrote to Jim Koller: "The riddles in this book are real riddles, with answers. . . . They are the first American koans" (*Letters* 2:175). By calling these works koans, Welch implies there is a deep spiritual insight to be discovered in solving them--as there is in Zen study, from which Welch takes the term. The third of these poems, "The Rider Riddle," pertains most directly to the furthering of inhabitation:

If you spend as much time on the Mountain as you  
should, She will always give you a Sentient Being to  
ride: animal, plant, insect, reptile, or any of the  
Numberless Forms.

What do you ride?

(There is one right answer for every person, and  
only that person can really know what it is.) (128)

The strategy is to engage the reader's interest enough to get him to go outside and look around. As a re-inhabitory strategy, to select a totem, the "animal, plant, insect, [or] reptile" one rides, and to suggest that others do likewise will lead to inhabitation because of the gathering of information that close investigation of the environment will provide. Welch's book, *Ring of Bone*, culminates with "Song of Turkey Buzzard," his metaphorical present and future physical union with his totem, the "animal he rides," in order to demonstrate the significance of this discovery to himself and to his identification with place and inhabitation in action.

"Song of the Turkey Buzzard" begins with a short song of praise to place: "Praises, Tamalpais./Perfect in Wisdom and Beauty,/She of the Wheeling Birds" (133); then he specifies the dangers of seeking a certain "animal, plant, insect, reptile" rather than allowing the landscape, the place, to bring one, again stressing the reciprocity of place and human affairs:

The rider riddle is easy to ask,  
but the answer might surprise you.

How desperately I wanted Cougar  
(I, Leo, etc.)  
brilliant proofs: terrain,  
color, food,  
all nonsense. All made up.

They were always there, the  
laziest high-flyers, bronze-winged,  
the silent ones (133)

Welch's realization of the turkey vulture as his totem progresses through a number of experiences he shares with them and leads to a song of praise in which he characterizes the correspondences that he shares or wishes to share with the turkey vulture:

The very opposite of  
death

bird of re-birth  
Buzzard

meat is rotten meat made  
sweet again and

lean, unkillable, wing-locked  
soarer till he's but a

speck in the highest sky  
infallible

eye finds Feast! on  
baked concrete

free!

squashed rabbit ripened:  
our good cheese

(to keep the highways clean, and bother no Being)  
(135)

Here, Welch praises the turkey vulture for its inhabitory value, its place in the food chain as a scavenger, and its constant and direct examination of the environment for survival. The vulture not only inhabits the land, but it "keep[s] the highways clean and bother[s] no being" by living on the carrion and waste of the place; this purity of the vulture in its place appealed to Welch so much that the second half of the poem states his "Last Will and Testament." Welch assures his "continuance," or his lasting presence in the ecological cycles, by willing that his body be left out for the consumption of his totem, the bird he admired for being "absolutely pure" (*Bone* 72). The return to the cycles after death in the place one inhabited is one of the many ways land becomes sacred, and this recalls Gary Snyder's statement, "knowing who and where are intimately linked," and adds even greater significance to Welch's phrase, "we are what our land and air is." Lew Welch disappeared from Gary Snyder's land in the foothills of the Sierra on May 23, 1971. Even after many days of searching, neither he nor his body were found; some believe he accomplished what he announced as his intention in "Song of the Turkey Buzzard."

A true vision of California must include the information provided in the sciences, such as biology, demography, geology, ecology and many others, blended with personal experience and knowledge in order to produce and transmit a perspective that delineates and contains the knowledge of place and presence in California and on the planet. These three poets include such information in their works; the apparent goal is to introduce and demonstrate re-inhabitory strategies, to show them in action and to pass the knowledge and ideas along to others, both contemporary and future audiences. In creating strategies for re-inhabitation, ecology and mythology inform each other in the works of many poets who wish to foster the process of inhabitation: empirical observation of the natural world provides information and material for human understanding and a sense of reverence for place. The inter-dependence the poets show in their works provides for an appropriate relationship--specific to place--with the land on which one lives. To answer Thoreau's call for the wild, they integrate the elements necessary for in-

habiting the land, learning and expressing the mythology of the people, animals, plants, and land which comprise and co-incide in a place. The inhabitation of a land begins and continues when a people know their place well enough to constantly create and renew the mythology of ecology in the place in which they live.

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**THE ROBIN CONNECTION:  
ROBIN LAMPSON AND ROBINSON.JEFFERS**

By Arnold Schwab

A largely overlooked correspondent of Robinson and Una Jeffers was the California poet-novelist Robin Lampson, whose name does not appear in any published book or article about or by Robinson Jeffers that I have seen. By late 1969 or early 1970, Robert Brophy had learned of this correspondence and had written Lampson about it, but the latter, in the process of moving when he received Brophy's letter, laid it aside and the matter was dropped.<sup>1</sup> On July 2, 1976, Lampson wrote William F. Kimes, a Jeffers collector, that he would send him copies of his Jeffers letters but apparently did not do so;<sup>2</sup> in the same letter he pointed out that James M. Shebl, then a member of the English Department at the University of the Pacific where Lampson was author-in-residence, wanted to write an article about Lampson's connection with Jeffers. After my request for information concerning the whereabouts of the Jeffers-Lampson letters appeared in RJN, No. 63 (June 1983), Shebl informed me on November 21, 1983, that he had sixteen Jeffers-Lampson letters; two from Robinson, fourteen from Una, which he said were given to him by Lampson in the mid 70s, with the proviso that he write an article on the relationship. Since Shebl, author of *In This Wild Water: The Suppressed Poems of Robinson Jeffers* (1976), has not yet written or published the article after fifteen years, but is not inclined to release the letters, I am recording here the details of the relationship as fully as I can without having access to the actual manuscripts of the correspondence, having worked on this project for almost ten years.

Because Lampson has been all but forgotten, a brief sketch of his life may be in order. Born in Mokelumne Hill, Calaveras County, California, on February 2, 1900, the sixth of twelve children of a blacksmith, he was named Myrle Robbins Lampson (he later used Robin Lampson as his pen name). Both of his grandfathers were Gold Rush pioneers. He grew up in Geyserville, Sonoma County, California, graduating from Healdsburg High School at sixteen, when his first book of poems, *On Reaching Sixteen*, was published. Unable to afford college, he was employed successively as a newspaper reporter on the *Santa Rosa*



ROBIN LAMPSON, 2249 DWIGHT WAY, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA,  
JUNE 1939

*Republican* for six weeks in 1916; as a farmer, railroader, truck loader and driver, worker in a gas-engine factory, shipyard, warehouse, rural news reporter (for three months) on the *Sacramento Bee* (in 1917-18), full time reporter (for three months) on the *Sacramento Union* (summer of 1919), and as city editor and practically the entire editorial staff of the *Woodland Daily Mail* (in 1919). He worked his way through half a year at St. Mary's College in Oakland (though there is no official record of his attendance there),<sup>3</sup> contributing poems to its literary magazine, *The Collegian*, and enjoying the literature classes of the college's best-known teacher, "Brother Leo" (Dr. Francis Meehan).

Aided by a patron of his poetry, Lampson spent two years (1919-1921) at Stanford University, where he majored in English but also studied Russian and other Slavic languages. During the first eight months of 1920 he was, while a student, also a columnist with the Butte, Montana *Daily Bulletin*, a pro-labor newspaper which printed at irregular intervals his "Just Jottings" column; it sometimes consisted of his own poems. In his junior year his proficiency as a linguist--he was familiar with twelve languages and was later a professional translator of Russian--enabled him to get a job with the Quaker Unit of American Relief headed by Herbert Hoover, and he spent 1922 in Europe, helping to supply food in Germany, Russia and Poland. He left behind his wife, the former Bertha ("Gretchen") Goettsche, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Pomona College in the class of 1913 and nine years older than he, whom he married in 1921. Upon his return to America in 1923, he was unable to resume his education at Stanford because of restlessness and a shortage of funds. Instead, he settled in Fresno, California, where he opened a stamp shop while his wife taught German in high school. Between 1924 and 1931 he was a professional philatelist, though his chief love was poetry, which he continued to read and write.

In the academic year of 1931-32, he attended Fresno State College as a full-time student, studying literature, including modern poetry. Then he transferred to the University of California at Berkeley, from which he received an A.B. degree in December 1932, with Phi Beta Kappa honors. He began graduate work toward a Ph.D. but was repelled by the pedantry he found in the program and left it to concentrate on creative writing. Meanwhile, he was divorced by his wife in June 1933 and after the divorce was finalized a year later, he married Margaret Fraser, a fellow graduate student at Berkeley and also a poet, with whom he enjoyed a happy though childless marriage the rest of his life.

During the pre-World War II depression years, when his stamp shop went broke, he had a hard time earning a living; one of his jobs then, beginning it seems, in the spring of 1934, was teaching adult classes in verse writing and modern (post 1913) American poetry at the Berkeley Evening High School. In the 1930s he also worked as an unpaid poetry editor for the *Berkeley Courier* and short-lived poetry magazines. He was so hard up that he asked for and received financial aid from Jeffers' patron, Albert Bender. Though his two best known books, *Laughter out of the Ground* (1935) and *Death Loses a Pair of Wings* (1939) were both well received and publicized, especially in California where Lampson earned Commonwealth Club prizes and lecture engagements, he had no steady income and could not rely on writing for a livelihood.

The rest of Lampson's career is anti-climactic. The years between 1940 and 1970 are not well documented, but after America entered World War II, he worked for twenty-seven months as a railroad roundhouse clerk for the Santa Fe Railroad in Richmond California. Thereafter he wrote radio propaganda scripts for the Office of War Information and the U. S. State Department office in San Francisco. In 1947, he established a stamp shop in Richmond, which was increasingly successful till he closed it in 1968. The business took so much time and energy that he apparently had little, if any time left for writing poetry. "Thinking of all the books I might have written, even in poverty," he wrote a friend in 1970, ". . . I can now only hope that I have not sold my birthright for a mess of postage."<sup>4</sup> The writing he did in his later years consisted mostly of prose on California history, a lifelong interest. From April 1971 through 1977, he was hired as author-in-residence and as biographer of its late president, by the University of the Pacific to which he had donated his valuable stamp collection; but Lampson found the president's life dull, and was embittered by what he considered the faculty's indifference to his achievements as a poet-novelist and by the University's sale of the stamps for far less than their worth. Less than two months after leaving the university on February 8, 1978, he died in Sacramento, California.

Though references by Lampson to Robinson Jeffers in both his public and private writings can be traced, one can only speculate when Lampson first read him, but it was probably in the late 1920s. In 1974, Lampson wrote a correspondent that he had read "nearly all of [Jeffers'] long narrative poems, and have nearly all of his books in my library."<sup>5</sup> But the main connection

between the two men had occurred almost forty years earlier, when Lampson was a practicing poet and editor-critic of poetry. On February 25, 1933, he began conducting a column in the *Courier*, a weekly published in Berkeley. It had a circulation in Berkeley of about 8,000, mostly non-subscribers, and perhaps some 500 copies were sent out to other towns and cities. Lampson informed Albert Bender in 1934, after the column had been appearing for some seventeen months, "I think that my column can easily lay claim to being the most important poetry publication in the west at the present time. . . . leading American publishers--Knopf, Scribner's, Macmillan, etc.--have begun sending me their works of verse for review." The only compensation Lampson received for his work<sup>6</sup> was having an outlet from time to time, for the publication of his own poems<sup>7</sup> and those of his second wife, as well as the prestige which no doubt helped him get a job as a teacher in Berkeley.

First called "The Poetry Scrapbook" but changed a week later to "The Poetic Viewpoint," the column appeared under that heading through October 26, 1935, when it disappeared without notice. In it Lampson printed short poems by such writers as D.H. Lawrence, Countee Cullen, Witter Bynner, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Vachel Lindsay, and Robert Frost, but most of the poems were by lesser known Californians. Beginning with the issue of July 8, 1933, he included news about publication of books of verse, about poetry magazines, prizes, markets, etc.; reviews also appeared, though infrequently.

The first reference to Jeffers in "The Poetic Viewpoint" was a brief mention in the issue of May 20, 1933, of the recent publication of *Give Your Heart to the Hawks*, which Lampson said he hoped to review and quote from later; in the column of January 6, 1934, Lampson reprinted from the *San Francisco Examiner* a review of this book by his close friend and mentor Arthur L. Price, who referred therein to Jeffers as "not only the foremost poet of California (the Legislature notwithstanding), [the Legislature had failed to appoint him poet laureate], but the foremost tragic poet of the English writing races, if not the foremost living tragic poet." Meanwhile, in the one issue of *Westward: A Magazine of Verse* that Lampson edited, dated August 1933 (Vol. 3), the bottom of almost every page contained brief quotations from Jeffers' *The Women at Point Sur; Cawdor; Roan Stallion; Tamar and Other Poems; Thurso's Landing; and Dear Judas.*

Una Jeffers may have seen these publications, for by February 3, 1934, she wrote Lampson, possibly initiating the correspondence with him; a passage from the letter can be quoted because Lampson reprinted it in the *Courier* of that date:

It is my personal opinion that these short and carefully selected verse columns are of more service to the cause of Poetry than Magazines of all-verse. Only people really interested in poetry pick up a poetry magazine, whereas the column catches and holds the eye of the indifferent general reader.<sup>8</sup>

In the *Courier* for April 28, 1934, Lampson quoted without comment a passage from *Cawdor* ("When Martial was able . . . like golden hammers").<sup>9</sup> A week later he quoted a passage from an undated letter Una wrote him about the terza-rima sonnet, a form which Lampson claimed he invented, and to which he had devoted an entire *Courier* column on January 13, 1934, that Robinson Jeffers must have read. "My husband was interested in your work with terza-rima form," she wrote. "He agreed with you in its perfection for sonnet form. He thinks it has the forceful upward jet of a fountain."<sup>10</sup> In his column of June 9, 1934, Lampson printed without comment an excerpt from the *Saturday Review of Literature* of May 12, 1934, in which the anonymous writer in effect berates the judges for awarding the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry to Robert Hillyer instead of Jeffers.<sup>11</sup>

It is not surprising then, that Lampson should receive an autographed photograph of Jeffers, of which he was very proud,<sup>12</sup> or that Una should describe Lampson in an unpublished letter to Bennett Cerf of Random House, Jeffers' publisher, on September 11, 1934--perhaps to urge the publisher to send him review copies of Jeffers' books--as the editor of "The Poetic Viewpoint" who "in season and out of season supports Robin ardently. He also gives an occasional lecture on RJ. He has a keen critical ability."<sup>13</sup> This is the only reference to Lampson by Robinson or Una Jeffers to a third party that I have found; it was this letter that led me to Lampson.

About this time Albert Bender loaned Lampson a copy of Lawrence Clark Powell's *Robinson Jeffers: The Man and his Work* (1934), which Lampson reviewed in almost an entire *Courier* column in the issue of October 20, 1934. Referring to this article, Lampson wrote Bender on October 29, 1934: "You will note . . . how intrigued I was by the Powell book," which, he added, the

Primavera Press had sent him for review but he had read Bender's copy before it arrived.<sup>14</sup> Two weeks later, in his full-column review of Millay's *Wine From These Grapes*, Lampson remarked that her poem "From a Train Window" and "The Fawn" reminded him of Jeffers' "Autumn Evening" and a stanza of Jeffers' "Night" respectively. These poems of hers, he remarked, though by no means imitations, showed the Jeffers influence "very subtly."<sup>15</sup> In the *Courier* of February 2, 1935, Lampson reprinted two poems by Jeffers from the January 1935 issue of *Scribner's Magazine*, "Shine, Republic" and "Rock and Hawk," the publication of which, he wrote, was a "real occasion in American poetry," finding it "exceedingly interesting" to compare "Shine, Republic" with the earlier "Shine, Perishing Republic."<sup>16</sup>

During the period of what seems to be his deepest involvement with Jeffers--the mid 1930s--Lampson himself was writing poetry, as he had been for many years. Though he had published in newspapers and little magazines, it was not until January 1934, when *Scribner's Magazine* accepted the title poem of what became his verse-novel *Laughter out of the Ground*, published in the following year, that his work was accepted by a major magazine.<sup>17</sup> "It is just as well that I didn't have much published [before then]," he recalled, probably in 1935, "for I had not yet learned the essential qualities of good modern poetry or good modern literature: that the trite words and phrases, the old-fashioned poetic and literary diction, had to be discarded; that the modern imagination and present day idiom had to temper whatever writing was to speak for this twentieth century."<sup>18</sup> His early verse was indeed derivative, if precocious, as he must have realized the more he studied and taught modern poetry.

For *Laughter Out of the Ground* Lampson sought a poetic style that would employ good everyday American speech as the vehicle for telling a novel-length epic story that would not be monotonous, highly symbolic, or ornate; that could be read quickly and enjoyably as a modern prose novel,<sup>19</sup> and that would permit a framework to "support and build up toward many fine lyrical and dramatic poems of an accumulated intensity not easily obtainable in a short, unattached lyric."<sup>20</sup> He found something of a prototype in the narrative poems of Jeffers. "When I started writing *Laughter*," he remembered in 1974, "I was very much under the influence of Jeffers' writing, but I did not care so much for the stories he told as I did for the power and beauty of individual passages and lines."<sup>21</sup> The vehicle he adopted was "free hexameters--lines having six wave-tops each and making use

of the natural cadences of English speech rather than of such classical devices as iambs, rhyme, and stanzas." Cadence was not new, he pointed out, having been used in *Beowulf*, the King James and other versions of the Bible, and in the poems of Blake, Whitman, Sandburg, and many others, "most notably in the narrative poems of Robinson Jeffers." But, he added, as far as he knew the free hexameters "have not been used previously in a work of these proportions" (the book consisting of 348 pages).<sup>22</sup>

The long, cadenced line used for an extended dramatic narrative, the California setting, and a plot involving violence were reminiscent of Jeffers. On February 12, 1935, when the last of three of Lampson's most recent poems had just appeared in *Scribner's Magazine* (where poems by Jeffers were appearing in the same year), Sydney S. Alberts, compiler of a Jeffers bibliography published two years earlier, wrote Una that he had had an interesting correspondence with Lampson. His ideas on literature seemed very sound, Alberts wrote, and he wondered what the Jefferses thought about Lampson's poems--probably because the form resembled Jeffers'. (After the publication of Lampson's *Terza-Rima Sonnets* later in the year, Alberts wrote Una on September 24th, asking her what she--and presumably Robinson Jeffers--thought of the book; he himself felt that Lampson was a nice sort of person, quite talented and with considerable promise, and he thanked Una for making the acquaintanceship possible.)<sup>23</sup> A reviewer remarked in the *News Letter and Wasp* of October 26, 1935, that as a poet "Mr. Lampson has been rightly termed the nearest thing we have to Robinson Jeffers."<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, Lampson had sent Jeffers a copy of the title poem from *Laughter out of the Ground* before its publication in *Scribner's Magazine* of June 1934, for in a letter to Albert Bender dated August 4, 1934, Lampson apparently quoted from a letter written to him by either Robinson or Una Jeffers in which Robinson described the poem "long before it was published" as "well written, full of thought, the stuff of poetry and on the side of life."<sup>25</sup> On October 22, 1935, Lampson, sending Jeffers a copy of the recently published *Laughter out of the Ground*, wrote him that the title poem, now the prologue to Part V of the book, was written after Lampson had read Jeffers poem "Shakespeare's Grave."<sup>26</sup> On November 7, 1935, Jeffers replied with what must be one of the two letters Lampson received from him. It can be quoted here, presumably in its entirety, because Lampson reprinted it on a sheet headed "Unsolicited statements by well-known authors and scholars" with the sub-heading "From One of the Greatest Modern Poets:"



Dear Robin Lampson:

Congratulations on Laughter out of the Ground. It is interesting and clearly visualized all the way through, an exciting and inclusive picture of the gold-migration. That is your theme, rather than the adventure of Sam Gibson, therefore you have done rightly to make him representative, rather than too complex or too individual, but he is strongly alive.

The versification is managed excellently. It must have been difficult to overcome the sing-song tendency of such highly anapestic verse, and the hexameter's monotony and tendency to break in the middle; but you have succeeded.

I wish you all good luck, and am delighted that verses of mine suggested (as you say) any passage in the poem. Your achievement is your own, and it is a big achievement.

Sincerely yours,

Robinson Jeffers<sup>27</sup>

Lampson used part or all of this letter on a dust jacket of *Laughter out of the Ground*,<sup>28</sup> Scribner's incorporating it in a new jacket after the publication of the first printing.<sup>29</sup>

A liberal, humanist, and something of an optimist, Lampson found Jeffers' inhumanism hard to swallow. Notes dated between June 6 and June 29, 1936, exist for a poem by Lampson tentatively entitled "Man is Everything," which seems to have been intended as a poetic reply to Jeffers; it may have been stimulated by a letter to Lampson from poet John Hall Wheelock, Lampson's editor at Scribner's and an admirer of Jeffers' poetry, who remarked on June 9, 1936, that he was glad that Lampson was giving the lie to Jeffers' nihilism. The title of this poem may have been changed to "The Man with the Barbed Wire Fence" or, more likely, Lampson may have begun a new poem with this title--it was apparently never completed<sup>30</sup>--which he described in a letter to Arthur L. Price dated August 15, 1936, as:

one phase of an answer to Jeffers. Jeffers says, essentially, "Escape your humanity, become an individual again, related and rooted only to the earth, not to your fellowmen"--this being the recurrent theme of poem after long poem with him.

But I can't imagine a civilized man living today in full self-realization without association with his fellowmen, dependence upon them, compromise with them. . . .

Jeffers is just about the most sublime poet writing in English today; but his philosophy is non-human. He values the clean non-consciousness of matter more than consciousness and life, calls life and consciousness "a temporary sickness of matter." It is just this philosophy that needs answering. . . . Because I am human, and enjoy life, and believe that life is organic to this earth that produced it, I must refute poetry that denies this; I must try to produce a poetry in affirmation of life.

Later that month, Lampson included Jeffers with Edwin Arlington Robinson and Carl Sandburg (with whom he also corresponded and from whom he also received an appreciative letter on *Laughter*) as "the best of a dozen" poets for whom his respect grew the more he read them.<sup>31</sup>

What, if any points of contact existed between Lampson and Jeffers between 1937 and 1941 cannot be established from the papers that I have seen. One guesses that Lampson sent Jeffers a copy of his second verse-novel, *Death Loses a Pair of Wings*, which deals with Dr. Gorgas's conquest of yellow fever, when it appeared in 1939 and that Robinson or Una replied. Early in January 1941, Una may have mentioned Lampson's name to the editor of the *Carmel Pine Cone* when that weekly newspaper was collecting tributes to Jeffers on the occasion of his fifty-fourth birthday. Lampson's tribute was printed in the *Pine Cone* on January 10th, Jeffers' birthday:

I am happy--and proud--to join in the *Pine Cone's* greetings and tribute to that gigantic and challenging Californian, Robinson Jeffers. . . .

During the past 15 years I have read every line of Jeffers' published poetry--much of it many times--deeply moved by its frequent passages of supreme poetic beauty.

Jeffers' place as a verse craftsman and poetic artist is firmly established. His stature is already great, his high rank among the English, American and world poets secure.

May he enjoy many more years of health and creative energy with his serene perspective and surgical analysis of this sick and troubled world.<sup>32</sup>

Deleted from the above, either by Lampson or the newspaper's editor, was the third paragraph of the draft, which read:

Jeffers tells us that he has "shorn the rhyme tassels" from his verse. His typical long line is an artistic combination of the Homeric hexameter line, the line of Biblical verse, as in the Psalms or Ecclesiastes, and the free-cadence long line of Walt Whitman. But while Whitman was haphazard with his lines, even careless at times, Jeffers always carefully measures out the cadences of his lines, with the result that they never fall flat in rhythm.

In turning down an invitation later that year by a group of San Francisco artists to speak on the place and problems of the contemporary poet, Lampson wrote the inviter: "I . . . feel that it is not one writer's business to tell any other writer what he should do. None of the important writers I know are doing so . . . Men like Steinbeck and Rob. Jeffers go quietly about writing what they have to write--not telling others what they should write."<sup>33</sup>

Thereafter a huge gap in Lampson's papers, covering the period 1942 to 1970, makes it impossible to determine whether he kept in touch with Robinson or Una Jeffers or referred to Jeffers in his letters. It is not until 1973 that a reference to Robinson Jeffers appears. In a letter dated April 2 of that year, to James Shebl, he enclosed an extract from Jeffers' poem "The Bed by the Window" from Jeffers' "poetry rich volume" *Thurso's Landing and Other Poems* (1932) comparing it with a passage from "The Pardoner's Tale," lines 720-731, as being "on a par with one of the most moving passages in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*." In the same letter he cites passages from *Thurso's Landing* that elucidated Jeffers' philosophy:

1. "The Place for No Story," p. 125
2. "November Surf," p. 128 (pollution of the ecology)
3. "The Bed by the Window," p. 130 (. . . "& calls thrice, Come J . . .")
4. "New Mexico Mountains," pp. 132-3. Especially last 4 stanzas.
5. "Second-best," p. 134. Geologic time, & J's view of the poet.
6. "Margrave," p. 135. This is for me Jeffers' poem that is most revealing of his philosophy. The narrative part is not one of his important stories, but is used as a thread stringing together some of his finest poetic passages, for example: The second paragraph, beginning at the bottom of p. 135 to the bottom of p. 136 where the story begins. Then, at the bottom of p. 141, J's view of man's tiny place in the universe resumes, and at the middle of p. 142 J. starts talking about himself, down thru the 16th line on p. 143. Then, beginning with "Oh beautiful capricious little saviour" on the last page, 147, we reach "It is very well ordered. . . . Similar lists of poems or passages from Jeffers' other books . . . could doubtless be made. . . ."

Three months later Lampson remarked in a letter: "Isn't it amazing that someone in Washington had the good sense to think of issuing a stamp for Robinson Jeffers (on August 13)?"<sup>34</sup>

Not long afterward, when his close friend Marlan Beilke was working on a book about Jeffers that appeared in 1977 as *Shining Clarity: God and Man in the Works of Robinson Jeffers*, Lampson, asked by Beilke to write a foreword for the book, was receptive to the idea; but, he warned, Beilke might not like what he would write, for "I really don't feel as hopeless about the human race as he does--though I despise a great many things which he does."<sup>35</sup> Eventually though, he "read the text of *Shining Clarity* through and through . . . and had many good suggestions to make," he did not write the foreword and, at his own request, was not mentioned in the book.<sup>36</sup> Lampson also remarked that he thought

William Everson "and his pals are making a racket out of their RJ reprints. What little I've read of Mr. E's writing about Jeffers . . . doesn't appeal to me at all, doesn't strike me as a sound or pertinent analysis of what Jeffers has to say. And I don't think it would have appealed to Jeffers."<sup>37</sup>

Though Robin Lampson ("Bob" to many of his friends, just as Robinson Jeffers was "Robin" to his) was not a leading poet or critic of his generation, his writings on Jeffers display a perceptive appreciation of the poet that deserves to be recorded. One hopes that James Shebl will soon print or release the Robinson and Una Jeffers letters he has guarded so long, so that the facts that could only be speculated upon herein, can be checked against those embodied in the letters; only then can a more detailed and, of course, a more fully documented account of the connection between Lampson and the Jefferses be provided---before, one trusts, the appearance of the collected Jeffers letters, now scheduled for publication in about 1992, which should include those to Robin Lampson, and which might contain additional references by Robinson and Una Jeffers to him.

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NOTES

1. Letter, Lampson to David M. Kirk, February 21, 1970. Unless indicated otherwise, all the documentation of this article is based on papers in the Lampson Collection at California State University, Long Beach, which I was instrumental in obtaining from Lampson's late brother, Clyde, at whose home the papers were stored. I am grateful to him for a personal interview on April 14, 1983, for copies of two of his brother's books, and for the loan of some of the Robin Lampson papers before they joined the Lampson Collection at Long Beach. Fortunately, Lampson kept typed copies or drafts of many of his letters, especially those written in his last years, though I have found none to the Jefferses.
2. Kimes could find no such letters in his collection (letter, Mrs. William F. Kimes to me, January 25, 1989).

3. Letter, St. Mary's College to me, February 26, 1990.
4. Letter, Lampson to David M. Kirk, February 21, 1970.
5. Letter, Lampson to Andy Flink, November 7, 1974.
6. Letter, Lampson to Albert Bender, July 11, 1934.  
(Bender Collection, Mills College)
7. An article about Lampson appears in the Courier, 58  
(May 27, 1933), 4, and an entire column, for example, is  
devoted to his own work in 59 (January 13, 1934), 3.
8. Vol. 59, p. 3.
9. Vol. 60, p. 14.
10. 60 (May 5, 1934), 14.
11. Vol. 10, p. 688.
12. Letter to me, May 8, 1990, from Roxana K. Upton, Lampson's  
unofficially adopted daughter.
13. Columbia University.
14. Bender Collection (Mills College).
15. 61 (November 10, 1934), 8.
16. Vol. 61, (February 2, 1935), p. 8.
17. Typescript of a radio interview of Lampson, dated October 4  
[1935?], by Robert McAndrew.
18. Typescript draft of a radio talk for Joseph Henry  
Jackson's program, dated October 20 (1935?), first  
(unnumbered) page.
19. Ibid., third (unnumbered) page.
20. "Author's Note," *Laughter out of the Ground* (New York:  
Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. xi.

21. Letter, Lampson to Andy Flink, November 7, 1934.
22. "Author's Note," p. ix.
23. The comments about Lampson were extracted by James Shebl from Alberts' letters to Una and given to Lampson in the late autumn of 1972.
24. Typescript of an extract from the review (California State Library).
25. Bender Collection (Mills College).
25. Jeffers Collection (University of Texas). I am indebted to Robert Kafka for information about this letter, which I have not seen.
27. Enclosure with Lampson's letter to Winfield Townley Scott, February 29, 1936 (Brown University).
28. RJN No. 63 (June 1983), 4, and telephone conversation with Brophy, June 28, 1990. I have not seen the jacket.
29. Letter, Lampson to James Shebl, March 24, 1975.
30. Letter, Lampson to Marlan Beilke, December 16, 1975.
31. Typescript headed "On First Looking into Carl Sandburg's 'The People, Yes'" and dated August 26, 1936.
32. Page 10.
33. Letter to unknown inviter, April 25, 1941.
34. Lampson to Earle G. Labor, July 5, 1973.
35. Letter, Lampson to Beilke, August 23, 1973.
36. Letter, Beilke to me, October 10, 1988.
37. Letter, Lampson to Beilke, August 23, 1973.

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